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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 1232
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND PRIORITY 0258
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY PRIORITY 0663
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000557

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TAGS: PREL MARR PHUM ASEC CASC FJ

SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 12/14: SMALL PROTEST, BIGGER PLANS?
MEDIA INTIMIDATION; GCC POSTPONED?

REF: SUVA 556 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

¶ 11. (C) Reportedly, Qarase's SDL Party had plans for peaceful protests following a coup. While SDL activism in the streets hasn't been obvious yet, 20 NGO members quietly marched through Suva streets at noon today. RFMF efforts to discourage dissent continued. The Chair of the Great Council of Chiefs said he may have to postpone next week's meeting, since Bainimarama fired the chief bureaucratic organizer yesterday. Tourism leaders report business is awful. They would like travel advisories to scale back but acknowledge governments are unlikely to do so in the short term. End summary.

SDL plans for people power protest

¶ 12. (U) The RFMF has provided the media with copies of action plans reportedly drawn up by PM Qarase's SDL Party prior to the coup. The plans' aim was to prevent the Army from exercising effective control, in part by encouraging peaceful demonstrations advocating lawful government. The plans propose a "people power" movement, with an effort to "quarantine" away "opportunist like Iliesa Duvuloco and other dubious nationalists." (Note: Duvuloco was one of those Fijian nationalists who orchestrated public, at times violent, demonstrations that fed into George Speight's coup in 2000.) The plans emphasize not to use violence or weapons, but to document any RFMF violence.

Twenty NGO members march in Suva

¶ 13. (U) About 20 members of Fiji NGOs made a noon march from Suva's central Ratu Sukuna Park to the Holy Trinity Cathedral to show support for peace, democracy, and the rule of law. NGOs included the Fiji Women's Crisis Center, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, and the Young People's Concern Network. Organizers said they could not get a permit to march, so they were just spreading the word of peace through the streets. The RFMF apparently was unaware that the march would happen. RFMF contacts told our DATT today that the military intends to dismantle check points outside of Suva this weekend and in Suva next Wednesday.

More intimidation of media and activists

¶ 14. (U) The editor of the Fiji Post newspaper, Robert Wolfgramm, an Aussie with Fiji roots, reported that an Army Captain visited him today to request that the paper tone down

its reporting and be more careful in its selection of photos, which, the Captain suggested, have portrayed the military too harshly. Wolfgramm said on radio he does not intend to comply, but he complimented the Captain for being polite. In early evening, Fiji TV reported that the Army had taken Wolfgramm into custody and was escorting him to his home to pick up his passport and work permit. The editor in chief of the Post, Masaki Koroi, is a close relative of PM Qarase's wife. The Army reportedly has been searching for Koroi and has threatened his neighbors. In late afternoon, Commodore Bainimarama announced more firings of government-board members and a few appointments. A notable departure from a board is activist Imrana Jalal, whose police report alleging a rape-threat phone call from the RFMF appeared in the Fiji Post today.

Possible postponement of GCC meeting

¶5. (U) With yesterday's announcement by Commodore Bainimarama that he has installed his brother, Ratu Meli Bainimarama, as CEO of the Fijian Affairs Board (FAB), Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) Chair Bokini suggested this morning that next week's GCC meeting may have to be postponed. Bokini asked the RFMF to re-instate the previous CEO. Bainimarama rejected that this afternoon, and he said the meeting should proceed as scheduled. Qarase said today that he very much wants to attend the GCC meeting; however, he complained, the Army has told Air Fiji not to let him board any of their flights from Lau. Army troops sealed off the FAB and the nearby National Lands Trust Board (NLTB) this morning, reportedly to search for documents to back charges of Qarase Government corruption.

SUVA 00000557 002 OF 002

Rabuka advocates: no coups

¶6. (U) Former PM Rabuka, who led Fiji's first two coups in 1987 and who was acquitted earlier this week on charges of inciting mutiny against Bainimarama in 2000, told the media today that "the age of coup culture is dead." Rabuka remains of the belief that his 1987 coups were necessary in order to establish the "foundation for modern Fiji," but he said he does not believe the current coup was necessary. Rabuka added, though, his view that PM Qarase and President Iloilo were weak leaders, who should have addressed RFMF complaints long ago.

Tourism Action Group does a door knock

¶7. (U) Leaders from Fiji's tourism establishment (hotels, Air Pacific, the Fiji Tourist Bureau) visited the RFMF, government offices, and embassies in Suva today, starting a process of attempting to resuscitate their industry. In a meeting with the Ambassador, the group described a marked decline in current bookings and almost no forward bookings for most resorts. They acknowledged that governments must provide travel advice to citizens when a coup happens, but they pleaded for pulling such advice back as soon as there is a sense things have returned to normal. We explained our role, and noted that we continue to evaluate the situation on the ground. The group did not really expect reassurance, given that Fiji has not returned to normal. We agreed to keep in communication. A prominent Indo-Fijian businessman told us today that pro-coup sentiment among Indians in Fiji's West has already diminished because of job losses.

Comment

¶8. (C) Today's peaceful march by the twenty NGO activists is the first street protest we are aware of since the coup. Reportedly many in the civil service are not showing up for work, making governance difficult. We keep hearing that resentment against the RFMF is percolating within the ethnic Fijian community, but there remains no obvious evidence on the streets, which remain much more quiet than usual.

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